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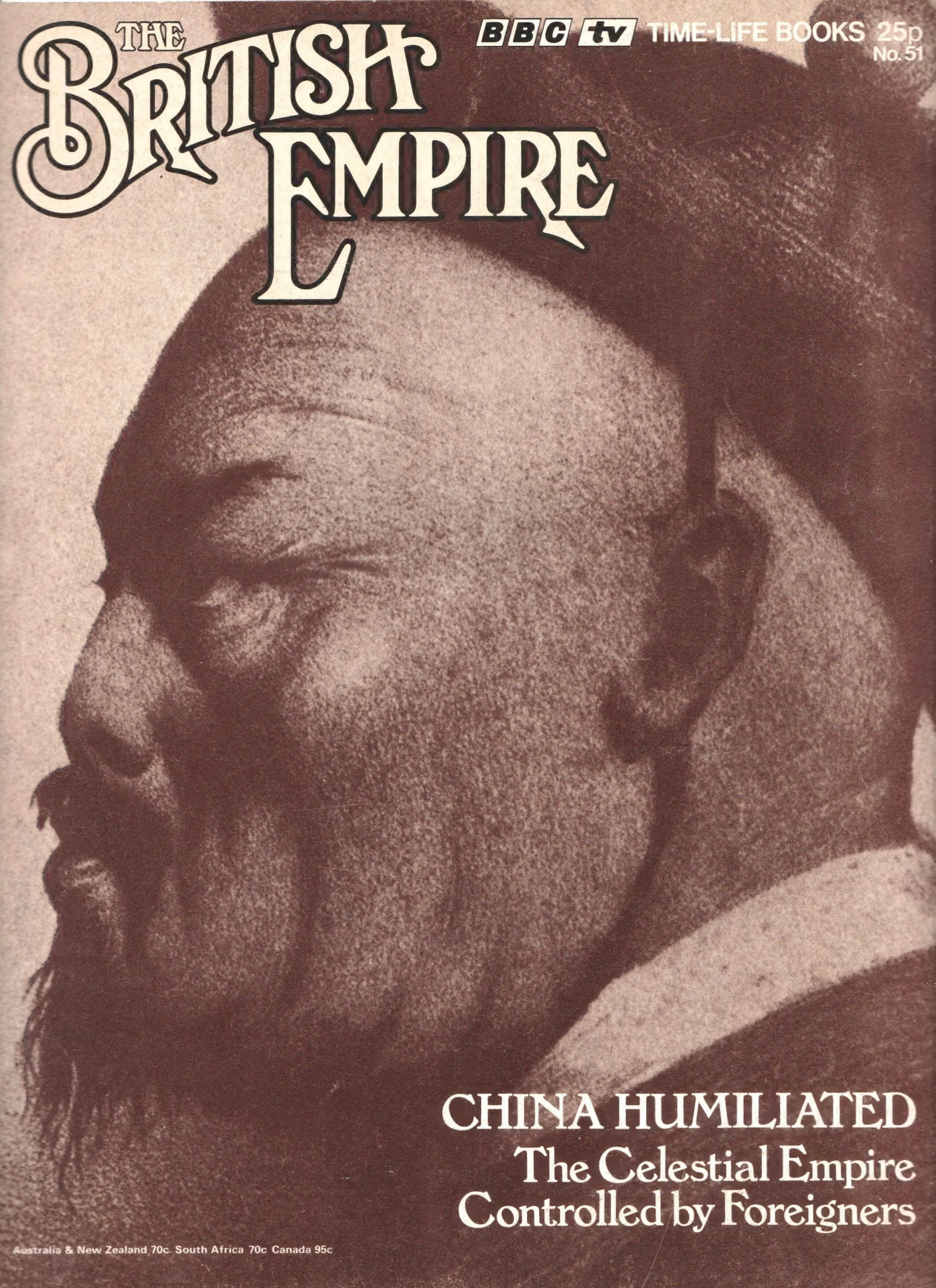

CHINA HUMILIATED

The Celestial Empire Controlled by Foreigners

Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

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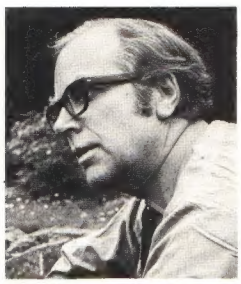

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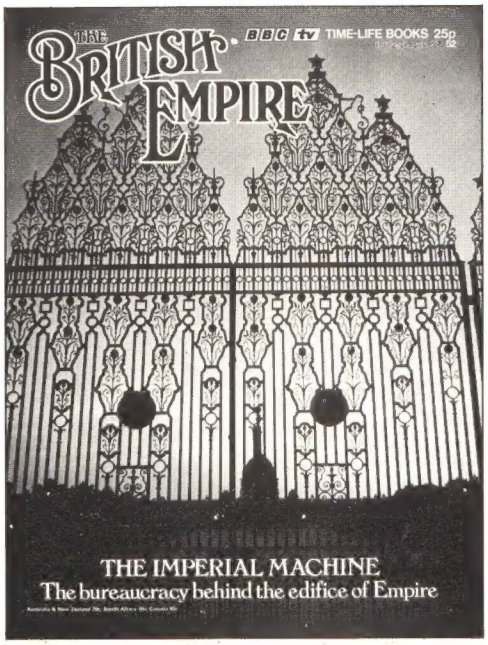

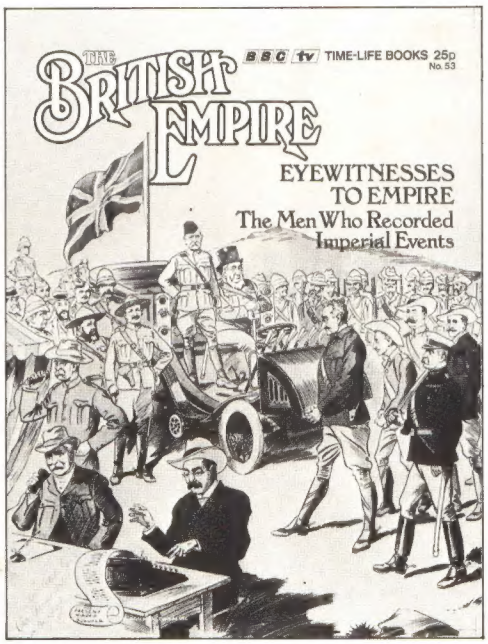

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CHINA HUMILIATED

In the 1840s, Britain became the first of the Western powers to batten on a prostrate China. 60 years later, she reaped a whirlwind of hatred.

by Christopher Hibbert

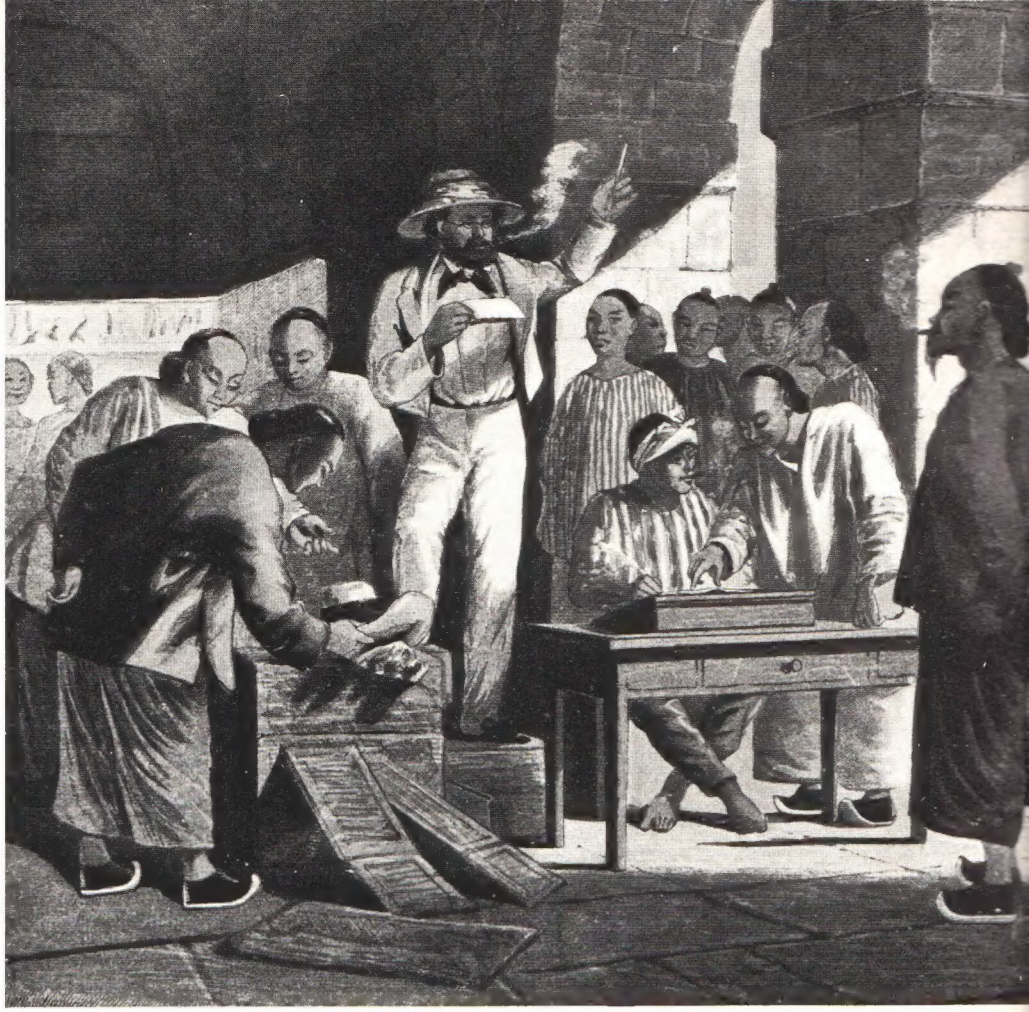
"We are definitely going to kill you, cut your heads off and burn you to death! We must strip off your skins and eat your flesh. Our hatred is already at white heat. . . . You English barbarians have formed the habits of wolves. . . . If we do not completely exterminate you pigs and dogs, we will no longer be manly Chinese able to support the sky on our heads and stand firmly on the earth."

Bloodthirsty threats like these had been constantly thrown at foreign merchants in China in the years following the Treaty of Nanking that had ended the Opium War in 1842. The war had won Hong Kong as a British colony, with its own governor, and forcefully opened five Chinese ports – Amoy, Foochow, Canton, Ningpo and Shanghai – to foreign trade. In every one of those places, but particularly in Hong Kong and Canton, Europeans and Americans felt themselves exposed to violence, to "the cup of the poisoner, the knife of the assassin and the torch of the midnight incendiary." The foreigners were jostled in the streets and sometimes spat upon; anti-foreign pamphlets were waved in their faces and placarded upon the walls; their windows were smashed; arson was not unusual, and riots were commonplace.

There was nothing new about such attitudes: Chinese superciliousness and xenophobia had antagonized the British long before the Opium War, which had merely been another link in the chain of Chinese rejection and foreign advance that continued until well into the 20th Century. The 60 years after the end of the Opium War saw this process taken to near-disastrous conclusions for both China and the "Foreign Devils." Western nations were to grab territory and wring leases for trading-ports from a government unable to withstand the commercial and military onslaught of more advanced nations. Rebellious Chinese religious zealots – the Taipings – were to take advantage of this process to carve out their own kingdom until their defeat by imperial troops. Eventually in 1900, ferociously anti-foreign rebels, known as "Boxers," were to accomplish the near eradication of foreign influence in China.

By hindsight, the origins of this crisis seem clear. In Canton in the 1840s, the foreigners could plainly see the hatred stirred up among the Chinese by their presence. Indeed, the foreigners had good cause to suspect that the Chinese authorities, far from lamenting the demonstrations and disturbances, actively encouraged them, since so long as the unrest continued there existed a perfect excuse for declining to observe the provisions of the Treaty of Nanking. At Canton, though the treaty provided that foreign

At the shipboard signing of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, one Chinese official was stunned to find the vessel powered by steam, not oxen.



merchants should be allowed to live inside the city walls, the mandarins claimed that if the foreigners did this it would be quite impossible to ensure their safety: the regrettably hostile attitude of the Cantonese made it imperative that the foreigners should, for their own safety, remain in the cramped area of their enclave along the Pearl River waterfront. Requests and complaints had no effect. Every fresh demand was either ignored or haughtily rejected by the Emperor's representative at Canton, Commissioner Yeh Ming-ch'en.

Commissioner Yeh was an imposing figure: strong, fat and arrogant, with a massive shaven head, glaring eyes and a ferocious black moustache. He was notoriously ill-tempered, highly intelligent, and his hatred of all foreigners was obsessional. He had been posted to Canton as Viceroy of Kwangtung and Kwangsi soon after the Opium War, and for more than ten years cunningly avoided making any concessions to the Foreign Devils without actually provoking them to use force. He was, in the words of Sir John Bowring, Governor of Hong Kong, the "very incarnation of ancient Chinese pride, ignorance and unteachableness." Bowring was sure Yeh would one day go too far. Sooner or later his "insufferable conduct" would provide an excuse for humbling him.

Bowring had been appointed to his post at the age of 62 in 1854. He was quite as intelligent as Commissioner Yeh and, in a less alarming way, just as ugly. He was also tactless, impatient, imprudent, fearless and extraordinarily versatile. He had started his erratic career as a clerk in Exeter, had then become in succession a journalist and a radical Member of Parliament. He had travelled widely, was an expert linguist, a Doctor of Law, a Fellow of the Royal Society, a hymn-writer, and a prolific author of travel books and translations of esoteric poetry. Having lost all his money, which he had unwisely invested in a South Wales ironworks during a depression, he had come out to China in the hopes of making provision for his family and of serving the interests of his country.

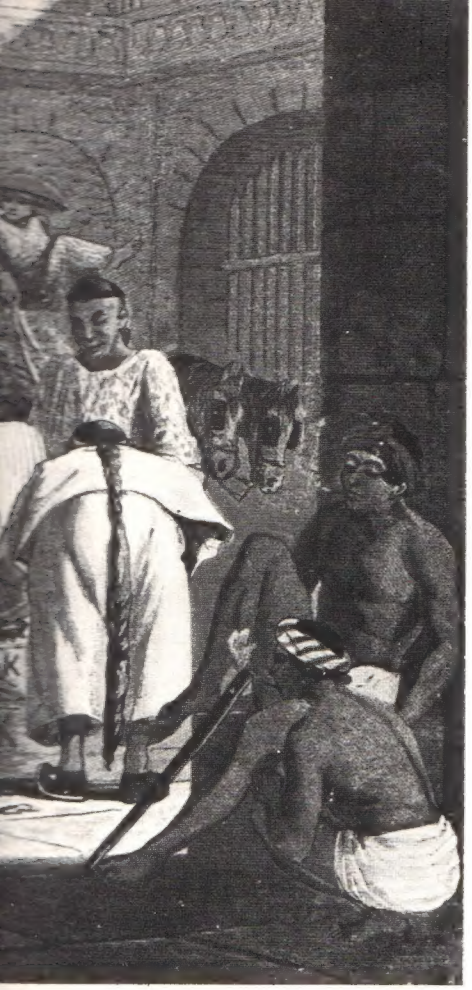
His subordinate, the Acting Consul at Canton, Harry Parkes, was an equally remarkable man. Parkes was less than half Bowring's age, but he had lived in China since he was a boy when, his parents having died, he had been sent out to a cousin who was married to a missionary. With his cousin's help he had completely mastered the Chinese language and, at the early age of 21, he had entered the consular service in which he had subsequently served with conspicuous success. He had become convinced that the only way to be certain of reaching a satisfactory agreement with the Chinese was never to make concessions, never to compromise. These were Sir John Bowring's views precisely.

The two men awaited their opportunity of confronting Commissioner Yeh in the battle of wits, and possibly of arms, that they both felt to be imminent. Their opportunity came in the autumn of 1856.

In October that year, the Chinese police at Canton boarded a sailing-vessel, the *Arrow*, which was lying at anchor in the Pearl River opposite the foreign enclave. They arrested the 12 members of the crew on the grounds that some of them were suspected of being pirates. The *Arrow* was owned by a Chinese, but she had been registered in Hong Kong, was therefore flying the British flag and in addition had a British captain. Technically, therefore, the Chinese had no authority over her; their proper course of action – under the terms laid down by treaty – would have been to ask the British authorities to arrest the crew on their behalf. When this was pointed out to Commissioner Yeh, however, he declined to agree that the *Arrow* was to be considered a foreign vessel: she had been built in China, was owned by a Chinese, was lying at anchor in Chinese waters, and had a Chinese crew. So far as Yeh was concerned, that was the end of it. He offered, as a gesture of goodwill, to return nine of the 12 members of the crew; but the other three would be held.

Harry Parkes, firmly backed by Bowring, remained adamant. The British would accept nothing less than the return of the entire crew together with an official apology. If Yeh would not give way, Bowring said he would "come up with the whole fleet."

Yeh was accordingly given an ultimatum to return the alleged pirates and apologize for their arrest, or be responsible for the consequences. Within an hour of the time set for the ultimatum's expiry, the prisoners were returned; but



British merchants hopefully show curious Cantonese their hats and cottons, some of the goods rushed out in the 1840s by traders in the mistaken belief that China's millions offered a ready market.

in the absence of any accompanying apology, Bowring felt himself justified in bringing the Royal Navy into action. In rapid succession, the four forts, known as the "Barrier Forts," that guarded the approaches to Canton five miles down the Pearl River from the city, were bombarded and captured; the city wall was shelled; and Yeh's official residence was invaded by a party of Marines.

The Commissioner himself escaped; and from a new headquarters in Canton he issued proclamations to the inhabitants assuring them that he would never give way to the demands of the Foreign Devils, promising them rewards for the severed heads of Englishmen, and inciting them to set fire to the foreign factories.

As a result, British and Chinese were on the verge of open war. The British captured or blew up several more Chinese forts; they fired broadsides on concentrations of Chinese war junks; they again shelled the city's outer defences, widening the breaches in the walls. The Chinese responded by sinking hulks across the channels, drawing iron chains from bank to bank, ramming the English ships with fire-rafts, and throwing aboard them burning stinkpots of powdered sulphur which caused so poisonous and suffocating a smell that the sailors jumped overboard to escape the fumes. On December 15, a screaming Cantonese mob, responding to Yeh's warlike promptings, set fire to the town's foreign factories.

The ferocious features of Yeh Ming-ch'en, Imperial Commissioner at Canton in the 1850s, came to symbolize China's unbending hostility to British efforts to expand trade.

To Bowring in Hong Kong, where matters were almost as serious as in Canton, it seemed that the situation threatened to get entirely out of hand. Foreigners were so frequently assaulted in the streets that it was unsafe to venture out even in daylight. An attempt had been made to poison the entire British colony by smuggling arsenic into the main bakery and baking it into the Europeans' bread. As it happened, the dose was so enormous that everyone was violently sick and vomited the poison before it had time to act.

On January 10, 1857, Bowring decided that he could afford to wait no longer. He dispatched a message to the Governor-General of India asking for 5,000 troops. At the same time he wrote to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Clarendon, explaining that the British Army's presence in China had become "absolutely necessary," as the capture and occupation of Canton – "the gate of China," as he called it – was now essential to Britain's honour and her future as a power in the Far East.

Lord Clarendon was inclined to agree. So was the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston. Indeed, Palmerston, the embodiment of "gunboat diplomacy," had no doubt at all that the Chinese deserved a good beating. "These half-civilized governments such as those in China, Portugal and Spanish America," he wrote, "all require a dressing every eight or ten years to keep them in order."

Although many members of the government were disposed to subscribe to this view, they could not but be aware of their vulnerability when the time came to defend Bowring's actions in Parliament. As the Attorney-General himself had expressed it, the Governor's action was "somewhat more high-handed than was absolutely necessary."

The Opposition – including a passionately indignant Gladstone – made the

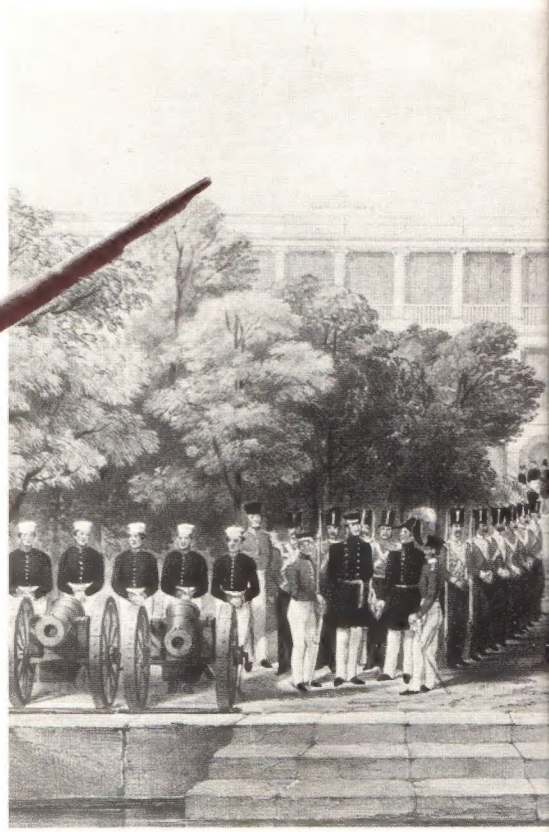
most of their opportunity. The *Arrow*, Gladstone contended, may well have been carrying nothing more than rice; but it was an undoubted fact that most vessels of that kind were used in the smuggling of opium, banned decades before by the Emperor but imported illegally in ever-increasing amounts by foreign traders. To fight for the right of entry into Canton was to take up arms "in defence of a repugnant trade."

Gladstone's arguments were convincing. Though the House of Lords backed Palmerston, the Commons rejected him. After two months of acrimonious debate, Palmerston, determined that the government would not resign, advised Victoria to dissolve Parliament, confident that in a general election the country would utterly reject the "wretched cant and humbug" of the Opposition. As part of the election campaign that followed, Palmerston fiercely castigated Commissioner Yeh as "one of the most savage barbarians that ever disgraced a nation," guilty of every crime which could "degrade and debase human nature."

Extravagant though it was, this was the kind of language the country wanted to hear. Most newspapers, including *The Times*, endorsed it. It added spice to the domestic issues that dominated the campaign. And most electors, when the time came, cast their votes in Palmerston's support. In early April, the government greatly increased its majority; and Palmerston was free to apply firm diplomatic policy in China.

The British Envoy sent out to China to supervise this policy was James Bruce, eighth Earl of Elgin, the son of that Lord Elgin who had brought back at great personal expense the marble friezes from the neglected Parthenon. He was only 45 but had already retired from a distinguished diplomatic career during which he had been Governor of Jamaica and Governor-General of Canada. Patient, humane and conscientious, he seemed an ideal choice for the difficult appointment.

His instructions were to proceed to Hong Kong, to make contact there with Sir John Bowring, and then sail north to the mouth of the Peiho River in the capital province of Chihli. He was to ask the Emperor's representatives in Chihli for compensation for losses incurred during the recent disturbances in the southern provinces, and obtain undertakings that the Treaty of Nanking would in future be observed. He was also to procure permission for an English Ambassador either to live permanently in Peking or at least to make occasional visits there, and for the British Superintendent of Trade to communicate directly with the Chinese government rather than with the group of Chinese merchants known as the "Co-Hong," through whom – despite the provisions of the Treaty of Nanking – all business was still being conducted. Finally, Elgin was to try to persuade the Chinese to open other ports



China's archaic weaponry was a severe handicap in its 19th-Century encounters with the West. The bow and arrow (above) was still common, although the fuse matchlock (left), already obsolete in the West, had recently been acquired. By contrast, the British, like the guard (right) posing outside the East India Company office in Canton, could always marshal an imposing array.

to trade, in addition to the five opened by the late war. He was to use force only if necessary, and Elgin fervently hoped it would not be.

Immediately upon landing at Hong Kong, however, he was curtly informed by Sir John Bowring that force certainly *would* be needed. Nothing could be done with the Chinese until Canton had been captured; a masterful display of British might would soon settle the issue that no amount of inevitably meaningless negotiations could possibly resolve.

Elgin soon discovered that these views were shared, not only by Bowring's colleagues in Hong Kong, but also by the foreign merchants and by Admiral Sir Michael Seymour, commander of the naval forces in the area. Seymour assured Elgin that of course he would escort him to the mouth of the Peiho River in accordance with his instructions, if he were really determined to follow them. But they were quite unrealistic. It was highly unlikely that anything would be achieved by negotiations in Chihli; and a failure there might well result in a war far more costly and disruptive than a quick engagement, which was all that would be necessary to bring Commissioner Yeh and the Cantonese to their senses. Canton was the place to fight, Admiral Seymour insisted; and Elgin gloomily concluded that there was a fixed idea in Hong Kong that "nothing could be done till there had been a general massacre at Canton."

Yet even if he had been convinced by these arguments, Elgin did not have the means to implement them. For during his voyage out to China in 1857, news had arrived of the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny. All available British troops in the area would be required. The regiments on their way out to Hong Kong were diverted to Calcutta.

Lack of troops was but one of Elgin's problems. Another was that the British were not acting alone, as they had done in the Opium War. This time they had allies to consider: the French.

Some months before, a French missionary had been beaten, tortured and decapitated in the province of Kwangsi. His heart, so a horrified public in France was assured, was "torn out of his chest and, still beating, was placed on a plate where it was closely and joyously examined by his barbarian and bloodthirsty torturers. Then they chopped it into pieces, fried it in a pan with pig's grease and ate it." As the champions of Christianity in China, the French were determined not to let so horrifying a murder pass unavenged. Napoleon III approved the formation of an expeditionary force, and appointed Baron Gros his Commissaire-Extraordinaire in China.

By the time of Elgin's arrival in Hong Kong, Baron Gros, a leisurely, cultivated man with a strong distaste for uncomfortable journeys, was still sailing serenely round the Cape. Lord Elgin impatiently awaited Gros's arrival in deepening dismay and in mounting irritation with the vehement Bowring.

In Canton, Yeh heard about Elgin's discomfiture with relish. "Elgin passes day after day at Hong Kong," he reported contentedly, "stamping his foot and sighing." But then at last in the middle of October, Baron Gros arrived in China, and, although slow-moving, unsociable, and excessively fastidious, turned out to be a man whom Elgin could like and trust. They shared a dislike of the "Hong Kong fire-eaters" and agreed to make such proposals to Yeh as the Chinese could accept without loss of face.

Indeed, their proposals were so mild that Elgin feared that if the Chinese did accept them, he and Gros would be "torn to pieces by all who were ravening" for vengeance. As it turned out, Yeh, in an enormously long reply, rejected the proposals with disdain; and the allies could now prepare for action.

Elgin contemplated the probable results of such action with the utmost concern. Canton was obviously quite unprepared to resist a determined attack; and he had "never felt so ashamed" of himself in his life as when he contemplated the orders that he was about to give. Mournfully he noticed that the day upon which the allied commanders had told him they would be ready to begin their assault was marked on his calendar as "The Massacre of the Innocents."

The bombardment of Canton began on the morning of December 28; and the resistance of the Chinese was totally ineffectual. A few Chinese guns lobbed their shots, in reply to the Navy's shelling, "in distant cabbage gardens"; a few Chinese rockets thudded harmlessly into the earth nowhere near the European troops. The assault-parties landed without difficulty, and had soon clambered on top of the city wall and occupied the surrounding heights, at a loss of eight British soldiers and two Frenchmen. Yet, as Elgin complained, "these incomprehensible Chinese," although they had offered scarcely any resistance, made not the slightest attempt to surrender. "They seem determined simply to ignore our presence here," *The Times* correspondent reported, "and wait till we are pleased to go away. Yeh lives much as usual."

He was not left to do so much longer. After waiting for a week for an offer of capitulation, patrols were sent into the town to capture him and the other mandarins. Yeh was caught trying to climb over the garden wall of his house, was carried away under guard and shipped off to Calcutta. He was replaced by a new government comprising his deputy, Pih-kuei, and three Europeans, including Harry Parkes.

Parkes was not at all satisfied with the way that affairs were now being conducted. He considered Elgin and Gros far too mild and conciliatory. "The Canton people appear completely perplexed," he

confided to the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs in London. "That a city should be captured and then at once given back into the hands of its former government is a circumstance wholly without precedence in their annals . . . I doubt they consider it as a mark of strength on our part."

Undeterred by the widespread criticisms of his leniency, Elgin wrote a polite and reasonable letter to Peking asking for a representative of the Chinese government to meet him at Shanghai to discuss the possibility of a new treaty. As though wholly oblivious to what had happened at Canton, the government replied by rebuking Lord Elgin for having so rudely ignored the principle, "ever religiously adhered to" by officials of the Celestial Empire in Peking, that there could be no direct intercourse with foreigners.

Faced by this lofty rebuff, Elgin decided that there was now no alternative but for him to follow his original instructions: to take his forces north to Chihli and enter the Peiho River. Baron Gros agreed with him; and thus it was that on May 20, 1858, French and British forces lay at anchor off Taku in the Gulf of Chihli where a series of forts protected the mouth of the winding river that led past Tientsin to the Chinese capital.

Watched by the Russian and American Ministers, ostensibly neutral observers yet determined to share in any benefits that the French and British might win, the attack began. It was over almost at once. Taku offered as little effective resistance as Canton had done. Lord Elgin ventured to say that "twenty-four determined men, with revolvers and . . . cartridges, might walk through China from one end to the other."

He himself sailed up the river to Tientsin without any opposition whatsoever being placed in his way; and at Tientsin, having threatened to "go on to Peking and demand a great deal more" when the Emperor's representatives began to prevaricate, he persuaded them on June 26 to sign a new treaty.

This treaty, the Treaty of Tientsin, was intended to confirm the surrender of the Chinese. It stipulated that ten more Chinese ports should be opened to trade and to British naval vessels, that disputes between British subjects in China should henceforth be dealt with by British officials, that British merchants should be free to travel freely in China outside the Treaty Ports, and that an indemnity of $4,000,000 should be paid for the losses incurred at Canton and for the expenses of the subsequent expedition. It was also agreed that the freedom of missionary activity should be guaranteed by the Chinese and that the trade in smuggled opium should be legalized.

There were strong reservations about the last of these provisions; but there seemed no other way to control the steadily growing opium trade. In 1857 well over 60,000 chests were imported from India, mostly in British ships through British firms in Hong Kong. Even if the British ever stamped out the trade – unlikely in view of its importance to the economy of the Indian Empire – it would, it was felt, merely be carried on by the Americans who were already to a lesser extent involved. If, however, the trade was legalized and the tariff fixed much higher than that for other goods, imports of the drug would be unlikely to increase, while the beneficiaries would be the Chinese government rather than the Chinese officials and merchants, thoroughly corrupted with bribes as they were by the smugglers.

The French, Russians and Americans, all of whom had also taken the opportunity to sign favourable treaties with the Chinese at Tientsin, sailed home well pleased with their gains. Lord Elgin also returned home satisfied, thankful to be able to get out of China, hoping that he would never have to set foot there again. His hopes were not to be realized.

He had not been home in Scotland long when well-supported rumours, reported to London from Hong Kong, indicated that the Chinese government had no intention of meekly ratifying the Treaty of Tientsin. It appeared that a firmer policy with the West had been decided upon at Peking; the Taku forts had been repaired and strengthened; strong forces of Chinese troops were massing in Chihli province to resist any attempt to enforce ratification of the treaty. Confronted by such intransigence, the British and French governments decided on a firm diplomatic line, and, prepared for renewed conflict, sent out powerful naval forces with their respective Ministers in case they experienced any difficulties during their journey to Peking.

Admiral Sir James Hope, Seymour's successor as naval commander, did not believe that there would be any difficulties with the Chinese that a couple of British gunboats could not settle. When the Chinese denied the allied Ministers access to the Peiho River, Hope gave orders for an attack on the Taku forts without troubling either to devise a careful plan of operations or to discover the strength of the enemy opposition. He paid dearly for his misguided self-confidence. His gunboats, tightly packed together in the Gulf, came under a ferocious fire from the forts; his landing-parties were driven back exhausted across the mud; his losses in men and material were shamefully heavy. His defeat was both complete and utterly humiliating.

The government was at first inclined to be cautious. "We must, I think, resent this outrage in some way or other," Palmerston wrote vaguely. But he was not at all sure what could be done: "To make an attack on Peking would be an operation of great magnitude." Lord Elgin, who had been given a seat in the Cabinet as Postmaster-General on his return from China the year before, also urged caution. He said that he strongly opposed "the general notion that if we use the bludgeon freely enough we can do anything in China."

The Press, however, cried out for revenge; the "perfidious hordes of China," trumpeted one newspaper, should be taught such a lesson that "the name of European" would thereafter be "a passport of fear throughout the land."

Such opinions were too strong for the government to resist. The attitude of the Cabinet hardened; and in May, 1860, an allied expeditionary force of about 11,000 British and Indian troops and 7,000 French was dispatched to Shanghai. At the end of June, Lord Elgin joined them there as diplomatic representative, feeling that he must be the "greatest fool that the world ever saw" to have become involved once more with Chinese affairs.

The British commander, Sir James Hope Grant – not to be confused with the naval commander, Sir James Hope – was an inarticulate, well-liked Scotsman who, though no outstanding general, was

judged perfectly capable of getting his army inside the walls of Peking. His French counterpart was General Cousin de Montauban, irascible and touchy but equally competent. Between them they managed to get their troops ashore without undue difficulty, and by the middle of August they were in position to assault the Taku forts from the rear. The Chinese put up a determined resistance at Taku, so strong a resistance indeed that an unfounded rumour went round the British army that their Mongol commander, Seng-ko-lin-ch'in, was not a Chinaman at all but an Irish adventurer, Sam Collinson, a well-known Anglophobe.

Seng-ko-lin-ch'in's soldiers bravely held to their antiquated guns in the forts, shooting bolts from cross-bows as well as firing round shot from their cannon, discharging flights of arrows, and hurling pots filled with lime and bits of masonry at the assaulting troops, but such methods could hardly impede the allies for long. They slowly advanced across the swampy saltmarsh that adjoined the forts. In the final assault many lives were lost and, on the British side, no less than six Victoria Crosses were won. But by nightfall on August 21 the allies were in possession of the forts; hundreds of Chinese troops lay dead beneath them; and Seng-ko-lin-ch'in, advised that it would be wasteful to risk his person "in combat with ugly Barbarians," had ridden off to Peking.

The allies moved off in his pursuit; but after passing Tientsin they were halted by a letter from Prince I, the Emperor's cousin, who now agreed to surrender. When Harry Parkes met Prince I at Tungchow, however, he found him far less reasonable than his letter had indicated; and it soon became clear that the warlike counsels of Seng-ko-lin-ch'in had prevailed at Court. Far from surrendering, the Chinese turned round to fight; Parkes and other British officials, together with a party of Sikhs, were ambushed and captured; and the war began in earnest.

To punish the Chinese for the treachery of their leaders, the town of Chang-chia-wan was handed over to allied troops to loot before the armies moved forward. It was a portent of what was to follow. Crossing the Yangliang Canal, the allied armies reached the Emperor's Summer Palace of Yüan-ming Yüan. This was looted of its countless precious objects, first by French, then – when most of the best pieces had gone – by British troops. Silver clocks and rosewood tables, enamel screens and porcelain vases, peacocks' feathers and rare jewels, crystal chandeliers and gilt looking-glasses, pictures, books, jade and furs, silk robes and fans, jewelled musical-boxes and mechanical toys, all the accumulated treasures of centuries, were soon being carried in armfuls from the buildings, tipped into wagons or piled in broken pieces on the paths. What could not be carried off was smashed with clubs and rifle butts; what could not be torn from the walls or ceilings was shot to pieces. No attempt had been made by the Chinese Court to take the most valuable objects away, or even to hide them. The Emperor's bedroom was found just as he had left it, with "sundry writings in the vermilion pencil about the Barbarians" under his pillow.

Lord Elgin, whose authority did not run to military affairs, was appalled by the unchecked desecration; but he was even more appalled when he heard that several of the allied prisoners captured at Tungchow had been savagely tortured and murdered. He listened with horror as the details of their deaths were made known to him, and immediately decided that "not for vengeance but for future security" these "atrocious crimes" ought

Fair Game for Gunboats

For Chinese pirates, as much as for British merchants, the Opium War was a boon: by opening Chinese ports to European trade, it brought a rush of merchant shipping that offered unprecedented pickings for pirates. Since there was no Chinese navy, Britain sent some of the gunboats stationed at the Treaty Ports to combat the threat. These operations were rarely hazardous and often profitable. For pirate junks were no match for British warships. And Parliament had offered a tempting incentive: £20 was paid for every pirate killed or captured. Even if a captured pirate escaped he was worth £5 to the British crew.

Spurred by these inducements, the Navy made sure that the heyday of the pirates was brief. Between 1843 and 1851, when the menace was as good as over, gunboats destroyed or captured 150 pirate junks and headmoney was claimed for 7,500 pirates. In one action, 58 out of a squadron of 64 junks were destroyed and 1,700 pirates killed – all without a single British loss.

Chinese junks erupt in flames under the shelling of British gunboats in 1849.

to be "severely dealt with." He knew that a demand for the culprits to be delivered up to him would merely result in the handing over of a few scapegoats, and that it would be impossible to collect an appropriately large indemnity. So he came to the conclusion that the wholesale destruction of the looted Summer Palace was the least objectionable of the several courses open to him. "As almost all the valuables had already been taken from the place," he reported to London, "the Army would go there, not to pillage, but to mark, by a solemn act of retribution, [our] horror and indignation."

For two days the work of destruction continued, covering the whole area with dense clouds of black smoke that were carried by a north-west wind over Peking itself, where showers of burnt embers fell into the streets. By October 24, when Lord Elgin's triumphal procession entered Peking by the surrendered Anting Gate, Yüan-ming Yüan and all Imperial property within several miles' radius lay in charred and blackened ruins.

When he heard this news, Lord Palmerston professed himself to be "quite enchanted." He was even more pleased with the Convention of Peking that was imposed upon the defeated Emperor, confirming and extending the Treaty of Tientsin. The indemnities were increased to $8,000,000; Tientsin was added to the list of ports to be opened to foreign trade; Kowloon was ceded to Britain; and the representatives of foreign powers were to be allowed to live in Peking.

Despite this humiliation to China, the Foreign Barbarians were not the greatest of the dangers that threatened China. There was another threat, one that might have overturned the ruling dynasty itself. It came from a ferocious, pseudo-Christian rebel sect, the "Taipings."

The Taipings owed their origins to a remarkable visionary and zealot named Hung Hsiu-ch'uan. Hung was born in 1814, one of the five children of a farmer from a village near Canton. The family was poor; but Hung seemed a promising child, so great sacrifices were made for him to undergo a lengthy and expensive education. Unfortunately Hung did not fulfil his early promise and repeatedly failed to pass the difficult examinations necessary for his advancement in the world. In 1837, during one of his numerous attempts to satisfy the examiners, he was handed in the street a pamphlet issued by a Chinese mission.

The next year, having failed his examinations yet again, he fell seriously ill and while he was in a state of delirium this pamphlet seems to have inspired a strange vision. Hung saw himself in a vast palace where there appeared an old man who handed him a sword telling him to use it to kill devils and to protect his brothers and sisters. There also appeared a younger man, who introduced himself to him as "Elder Brother" and went with him to fight the devils.

On his recovery it gradually became clear to Hung that the palace he had seen in his vision was Heaven, that the old man who lived there was God, and that the younger man, "Elder Brother," was Jesus Christ. Hung himself was, he now saw, the younger brother of Jesus Christ. By placing the sword in Hung's hands, God had appointed him his lieutenant on earth with the duty of wiping out all his enemies. These enemies were represented as the idols of false religions; they were incarnate in the evil servants, the mandarins, of the Manchu dynasty and in the person of the Manchu Emperor.

So passionately did Hung hold and preach this view, so convincing were his arguments and rhetoric that he soon made many converts to his idiosyncratic version of Christian teaching. The Society of God Worshippers that he founded rapidly grew in numbers and influence. Disciples took the gospel into other provinces until the movement was strong enough to occupy in the name of God the mountain town of Yungan, to proclaim a new dynasty, and to declare open war upon the government. The new dynasty was given the name of *T'ai-p'ing t'ien-kuo*, the "Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace." *T'ai-p'ing*, the name by which the rebels were known, is a very ancient expression for a period of happiness and plenty, and also contains a suggestion of equality, the idea of the equality of all people being a fundamental Taiping tenet.

From Yungan, Hung, having assumed the title of Heavenly King, led his followers, now 10,000 strong, into Kwangsi province, then into Hunan. He captured Yochow, Hanyang and Hankow; and as each town fell to the Taipings their numbers increased until by the end of 1852, when they set about besieging Wuchang, the capital of the province of Hupei, they constituted a force of over 100,000.

Their leaders – all elevated to the rank of King – proved far more adept military commanders than their Manchu opponents. They captured Wuchang with ease; with similar facility they took Nanking, slaughtering its entire Tartar garrison and their families – some 25,000 people in all – and renaming it the "Heavenly Capital." By the beginning of 1855 they had extended their control over the whole of the fertile Lower Yangtze Valley.

Once the rule of the Taipings was firmly established over such vast areas of central and southern China, foreign diplomatic and trading missions, hoping to establish friendly relations with a movement that, they thought, might one day overthrow the Manchu dynasty, began to arrive in Nanking. These missions were received in a friendly enough manner, but there was little benefit to either side. Foreigners soon grew disillusioned with Taiping methods and morals: the various Kings were continually quarrelling among themselves and occasionally fighting each other and their rivals' supporters, while Hung himself had by now virtually severed all connection with the outside world. He lived in a vast palace of exotic splendour, surrounded by concubines, periodically issuing obscure religious pronouncements and embellishments of his own legend.

During their sporadic forays against government and counter-revolutionary strongholds, the Taipings were described by foreign observers as behaving with ferocious violence, not merely destroying all the buildings of Manchu construction in any town they captured, but sometimes also massacring the entire population of towns that offered resistance. As the British representative in Peking observed, there was little hope now of "any good ever coming of the rebel movement. They do nothing but burn, murder and destroy."

Soon, repelled by the Taipings' ferocity, the foreigners took measures to prevent their encroaching any further into areas where their activities might disrupt trade. In June, 1860, when the rebels captured Soochow, less than 50 miles from Shanghai, Europeans in Shanghai recruited mercenaries to defend the city

THE STRUGGLE FOR PEKING

In 1859, Britain and France undertook a grand expedition to Peking. Its purpose was to force China to ratify the highly advantageous Treaty of Tientsin, itself forced upon local Chinese officials the previous year after the allied seizure of the strategic but weakly defended Taku forts that guarded the approaches to Peking. However, the central government had refused to approve the treaty, and the allies set out to compel compliance.

But they had underestimated Chinese intransigence. The Taku forts had been vastly strengthened and an over-confident attack on June 25, 1859 (below), ended in a stinging rebuff under a hail of cannon-shot. The allied revenge was devastating: in 1860 they advanced on Peking and triumphantly occupied the capital.

Taking Taku

On August 1, 1860 a combined British-French force of 18,000 under Commander Hope Grant was poised at the mouth of the Peiho River, ready to avenge the defeat of the year before. This time, rather than risk a second defeat with a sea-borne attack on the Taku forts, the allies approached from the landward side, taking three towns and one undefended fort in an arduous, 20-day trek through mud that was often knee-deep.

Dikes and a forest of bamboo stakes slowed the allied approach on the key Northern fort. And as the troops advanced, holding scaling-ladders above their heads, they were met with a rain of cannon-shot, arrows and pots filled with caustic-lime. Even when the fort was as good as taken, the Chinese soldiers kept up a furious artillery resistance, in part, one British officer reported, because Chinese officers had tied their men to their guns.

Safely above mud-level with other officers, Commander Hope Grant sleeps under an umbrella.

When allied forces occupied the sprawling Pehtang fort at the start of their campaign, they found it deserted by the Chinese, who had concentrated their forces at the Taku forts.

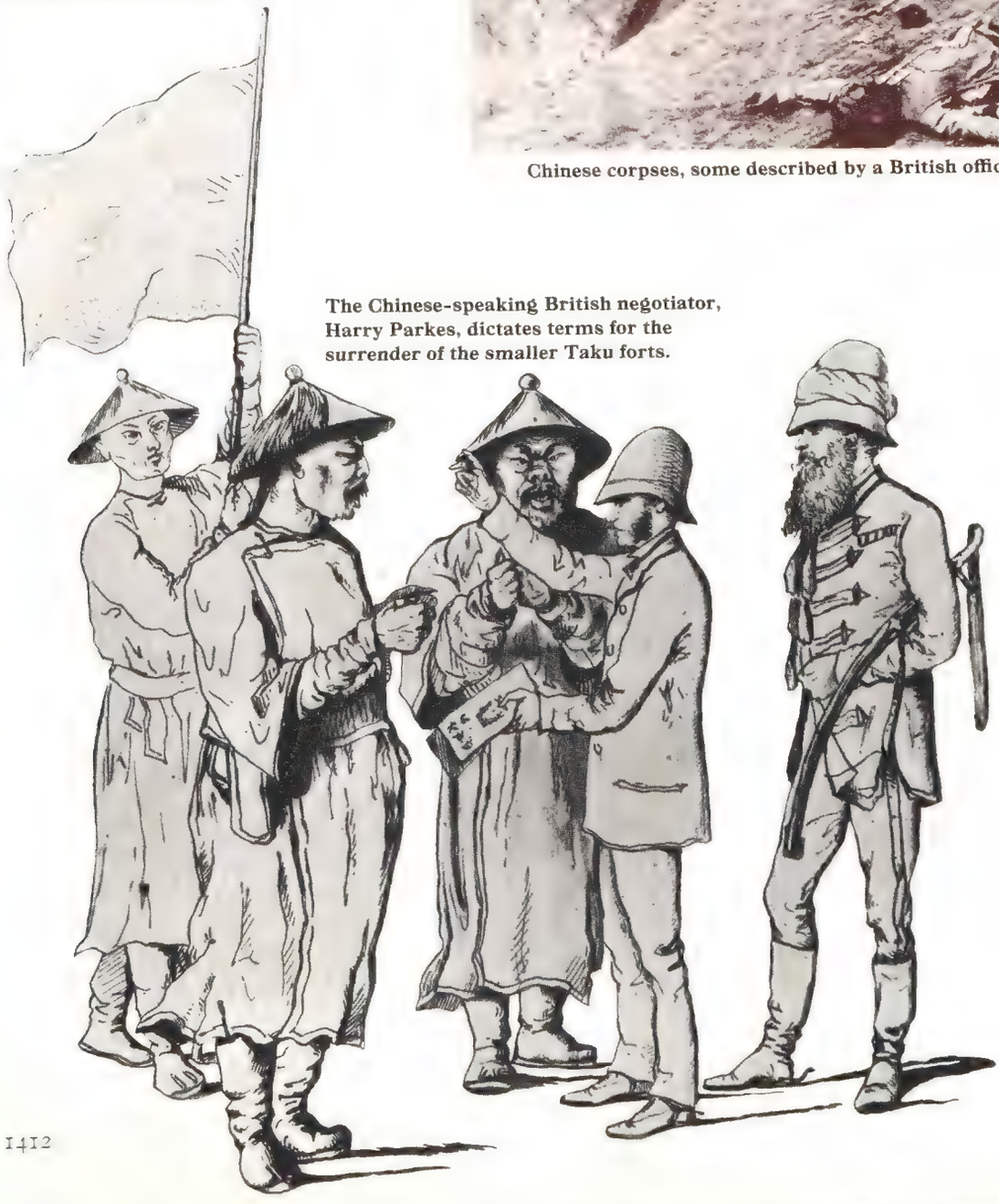
Allied officers watch as a shell blows up the magazine of one of the smaller Taku forts. Behind it, is their main goal: the key Northern fort.

Prisoners as Pawns

Although the three remaining Taku forts surrendered on August 22, the Chinese losses during the Taku operation were estimated at some 1,500. Allied losses were slight by comparison and the advance towards Peking was carried out in a mood of buoyant optimism that the long drawn-out negotiations would be concluded and that China would soon ratify the treaty. But when the allies were 12 miles from Peking and attempting to reach a negotiated agreement under a flag of truce, Harry Parkes, chief of the negotiating team, and 36 other Westerners were taken prisoner, bundled into carts and jailed as hostages.

The British Envoy, Lord Elgin, refused to be blackmailed into withdrawal and advanced to within six miles of the capital. The gamble paid off in part: Parkes and 20 others were freed, but 16 of the prisoners were murdered.

Chinese corpses, some described by a British officer as "most fearfully lacerated," are strewn



The Chinese-speaking British negotiator, Harry Parkes, dictates terms for the surrender of the smaller Taku forts.

throughout the shattered interior on the Northern Taku fort.

A British official unsuccessfully attempts to enter the walled city of Tungchow to demand the release of allied prisoners.

Chinese recover the swollen and mutilated bodies of allied prisoners. The men had been bound, chained and left in the open day and night until they died of exposure.

Barbarians Triumphant

The allies, seeking a strategic position from which to seize Peking, advanced to the Emperor's recently deserted Summer Palace just outside the city. Its fabulous collections of jewels, silver, porcelain and silk were looted, smashed, burned or hawked on street corners by troops drunk with the sight of such undefended treasure. Then the Chinese, in response to an ultimatum from Elgin, surrendered Peking's main gate to the "barbarians," as the Chinese termed all foreigners.

Elgin still felt however that the murder of the 16 prisoners demanded a "solemn act of retribution," and decided that the looted Summer Palace should be systematically burned, an act with which the French refused to be associated. The buildings burned for two days, darkening Peking with a pall of ash and smoke.

A week later, on October 24, with vengeance successfully exacted, Lord Elgin made a state entry into the capital to sign the Convention of Peking. This confirmed and extended the treaty wrung from China two years before.

Frightened Tartar ponies stumble and fall in ditch-strewn terrain at Pa-lee-chiao. Horses of the British Dragoons fared better, contributing to the later allied victory.

Carried by 16 Chinese dressed in crimson liveries, Lord Elgin enters Peking in state, proof that the Westerner was no longer a Chinese "vassal" but a victor.

A messenger (right) brings long-awaited news of the French to British officers discussing tactics in the crucial Battle of Pa-lee-chiao, six miles from Peking.

Lord Elgin seals the English version of the Convention of Peking while the Chinese copy is handed to Prince Kung, the Emperor's younger brother and chief negotiator with the allies.

II. China Awakened from the Past

In their early engagements the mercenaries recruited by the French and the British in Shanghai were not very successful and their ranks were strengthened with Chinese soldiers whose objection to being drilled and commanded by Foreign Devils had been overcome by generous rates of pay. This force was given the grandiloquent name of "The Ever Victorious Army," "a name to be taken," in the words of the Editor of the British-sponsored *China Mail*, "not in a literal but in a transcendental and Celestial sense." Only when command of the Ever Victorious Army was given to a young British officer of outstanding qualities – Major Charles George Gordon – did it become a force worthy of respect.

Gordon was a man of remarkable courage, and deep religious sense. Proud, touchy and resolute, he was also a rigid – even ruthless – disciplinarian. Once when faced with a mutiny, he had a man he supposed to be a ringleader shot on the spot, and won immediate compliance by threatening to shoot one in five of the rest of the men if they did not immediately submit. He had no taste for women. He never disguised his contempt for those who failed to live up to his own rigid standards. He expected his men to be on parade, as he would be, at sunrise. He went into action sprucely turned out, carrying nothing but a rattan cane; and when the action was over he retired alone to his Bible and his work.

In a series of actions against Taiping strongholds, the Ever Victorious Army under Gordon proved its worth in the Imperial cause. The cosmopolitan officers – mostly American, German, French, English, Spanish and Scandinavian – though unruly in garrison, were reliable in action with their 3,500 brown-uniformed troops.

Their exploits were given such prominence in the Press that it almost seemed as though the Ever Victorious Army were fighting the Taipings on its own. It played an important role, certainly, but it could have done little without the help of the Imperial Army, which was not only vastly greater in size, but which, under the direction of a new generation of military and civilian mandarins far more capable than their predecessors, was month by month growing in efficiency.

The Ever Victorious Army was eventually wound up in 1864, the year in which the Emperor's Army moved against the Taipings' last stronghold in Nanking. (Gordon himself later went on to acquire legendary fame by his death at the hands of Mahdist warriors in Khartoum in 1884, an event already described in this history.) On July 19, Chinese troops burst into Nanking through a breach that the explosion of an enormous mine had torn in the ramparts. The Heavenly King poisoned himself with a dose of gold-leaf, several of his concubines committed suicide by hanging themselves in the trees above his grave; 100,000 people in his capital, presumed to be his willing subjects, were decapitated, burned to death in their houses or drowned in the Yangtze. The reign of the Taipings was over. And from Peking there came an Imperial decree, giving thanks for the Empire's deliverance to "the bountiful protection of Heaven" and "the foresight and wisdom of the Empress Dowager."

The Empress Dowager, Yehonala, who had indeed been influential in devising Imperial policy against the Taipings, was a young woman of remarkable intelligence, energy and ambition. She was, in fact, just becoming the real power behind the Chinese throne, and she was to remain so for the next 50 years. She was the daughter of a minor Manchu official and had been chosen as a concubine for the Emperor Hsien-feng by his mother. Having provided the Emperor with a son, her influence at Court grew so rapidly that before she was 30 she dominated it. After Hsien-feng's death in 1862, she was appointed Regent. This was only a beginning: although the Regency officially came to an end when her son, T'ung-chih, assumed nominal control of the government in 1873, her influence remained supreme. Nor was it

impaired when T'ung-chih died of smallpox, since, by overruling all opposition, she had a compliant nephew, Kuang-hsü, proclaimed his successor. By intrigue, shrewd opportunism, and, many suspected, by murder, she was to make herself undisputed ruler of China.

The years that followed the Empress Dowager's rise to power saw Britain lead the way in Western and Japanese attempts to share out the "Chinese melon." Chinese satellites were lost: Burma to Britain, Vietnam to France. In China itself, Russia obtained leases of land and railway concessions in the north; France acquired mining and trading rights in the south; Germany used the murder of a missionary as an excuse to send troops into Shantung, winning a lease of land and commercial rights in the hinterland; and towards the turn of the century, Japan defeated China in war, wrested numerous islands, including Formosa, from her and forcefully opened several Chinese ports to Japanese trade.

The British were determined to have their full share of any concessions that could be wrung from the Chinese. They obtained a lease of the port of Weihaiwei, were granted further territories in Kwangtung inland from Kowloon, and enforced the opening of yet more ports to British trade.

The appearance of these ports – like that of all other ports opened to foreign trade along the Chinese coast – was soon transformed by the arrival of European merchants and officials with their families. The British, in particular, succeeded not merely in establishing new styles of architecture, but also in maintaining a way of life that they had been accustomed to at home.

A passenger sailing into one of the new harbours, pleasurably anticipating his first sight of the "Flowery Kingdom," would be astonished by the spectacle that greeted him. The Chinese houses seemed swamped by European villas with white-painted façades and shaded balconies, with English gardens of regular flowerbeds and neatly mown lawns. Behind these villas were row upon row of recently erected storehouses and workshops with roofs of galvanized zinc; along the waterfront and on the rivers were steamboats and cranes hooting and cranking against a background of cargo-crowded wharfs. In the larger ports there were offices and banks, European clubs with billiard-rooms and libraries, first-class hotels with European cuisine.

Reacting against this wholesale Westernization and the voracious appetite of the foreigner, Chinese reformers urged the modernization of the Empire as the only means of combating them. The young Emperor, Kuang-hsü, supported the progressives and embarked on a sudden, cataclysmic programme of reform, issuing edict after edict proclaiming changes in education, in the armed

Gordon's signature in China, the ideograms "ko teng," sounded roughly like his name and aptly translated as "lance advancing."

Gordon's bodyguard wears the distinctive turban of his Ever Victorious Army. This group, composed of disenchanted rebels who had abandoned their Taiping armies and surrendered, helped to quell the second of two mutinies against Gordon's rigid leadership in 1863.

General Charles Gordon, who helped suppress rebellion in China, wears the jacket reserved for the highest mandarin order. This honour, conferred by the Emperor in 1865, gained him the nickname of "Chinese Gordon."

forces, in commerce, in government administration, in the Press. Knowing that his conservative aunt, the Empress Dowager, strongly disapproved of his radical measures, he attempted to forestall any action she might take against him by having her kept a prisoner in her palace. But he was no match for the formidable woman who, learning of his intentions, came storming to his room in a terrifying rage and forced him to kneel down in submission at her feet.

The Empress Dowager had ideas of her own as to how the foreigner could be defeated. She rested her hopes in a recently formed secret society whose banners proclaimed the welcome summons: "Support the Manchus. Exterminate the Foreigners!" The members of this society practised a kind of shadow-boxing, Taoist in origin, that was known as *Shen Ch'üan*, "Spirit Boxing." Taking note of their addiction to this exercise, a missionary, writing in the *North China Daily News*, gave them the name by which they became known throughout the world: the Boxers.

The Boxers, fanatically xenophobic and anti-Christian, were subjected to the severest discipline by their commanders who did not permit them to eat meat, drink tea or have any contact with women. They were encouraged to practise strange rites and exercises, in addition to their shadow-boxing, and to work themselves up into states of such nervous exaltation that they induced fits, spasms and trances that made them appear immune to fear and pain.

To the Empress Dowager it seemed that in the strange power of the Boxers might be the salvation of China and the Manchu dynasty. When reports came of their attacks on missionaries and Chinese Christian converts, she did not disguise her satisfaction.

Up till now the British representative – or Minister as he was known – in Peking, Sir Claude MacDonald, had viewed the Boxers without too much concern. He assured London that there was "little to confirm the gloomy anticipation" that the Ministers of other countries were voicing. There was good reason, though, for their gloom. The French Minister had been informed by the Vicar-Apostolic of Peking, Monseigneur Favier, that the lives not only of missionaries but of all Europeans were in danger. "The Boxers' accomplices await them in Peking," he warned. "They mean to attack the churches first, then the Legations."

The French Minister urged MacDonald and the other foreign diplomats to induce the Chinese government to outlaw the Boxers – which at present they showed no inclination to do – by bringing an international guard into Peking to protect the Legations. But MacDonald still doubted that there was any real danger. He allowed his two little daughters to leave Peking for the cool of the British Legation bungalow in the Western Hills.

Even when the railway station at Fengtai, south of Peking, was attacked by Boxers and set on fire, and the houses of several Europeans further down the line were also burned, Sir Claude was satisfied that a guard of sailors and Marines from the warships anchored at the mouth of the Peiho would answer all purposes. The Legations, he assured the naval commander, Admiral Seymour, would be the "last place attacked."

As the stiflingly hot month of June, 1900, progressed, however, MacDonald was forced to change his mind: the anti-foreign violence was spreading beyond the ranks of Boxers, to Imperial troops from Kansu province. Towards the middle of the month, the Chancellor of the Japanese Legation, while on his way to the railway station, had been dragged from his cart by Kansu troops, who had taken violent exception to the sight of his Oriental features beneath a bowler-hat. They had slashed him apart with their swords, cut out his heart and sent it to their commander.

Less than a fortnight later, the Boxers themselves went on a wild rampage through the city, swinging swords and spears above their head, shouting their war-cry, "*Sha! Sha!*" (Kill! Kill!), looting shops and houses, setting fire to missions and other foreign buildings, cutting down all those whom they suspected of being Christian. A patrol of Marines, who went out after the slaughter to find any Chinese converts who might have escaped, came upon fearful sights, "women and children hacked to pieces, men trussed like fowls with noses and ears cut off and eyes gouged out."

At about the same time, the excitable German Minister, Baron von Ketteler – had recently been so outraged by the sight of two Boxers nonchalantly riding past his Legation in a cart that he had belaboured them with his walking-stick – was murdered in the street.

Nor was it only Boxers who were responsible for the atrocities. The Kansu troops also roared through the streets massacring countless people accused of being spies for the prime enemy – foreigners – or for "Secondary Devils," as Christians were called. A Chinese

Yehonola, Empress Dowager and effective ruler of China for almost 50 years, concealed her ruthlessness beneath a mask of extraordinary grace and charm.

witness, who was afterwards told that a quarter of a million people lost their lives in Peking that summer, remembered with horror "the shrieks of the women and children whom they were butchering and their shouts in the Kansu dialect, 'Bring out the Secondary Devils!' . . . Their swords and clothes were dripping with blood, as if they had come from a slaughter-house."

As yet the Legation quarter had been immune from attack; but after a meeting of the Chinese Imperial Council on June 17, when the Empress Dowager announced her intention of declaring war

upon the Western world, the foreigners knew that they would not be spared much longer. They were right. The siege began three days later.

No one supposed that it would last long. The Legation guards were limited to 20 regular officers, 389 men of eight different nationalities and four pieces of light artillery. The British Legation, being the largest and least exposed of the compounds, became the general headquarters and main stores. It also became the refuge of scores of American and European missionaries, lecturers, engineers, and customs officials, hundreds of Chinese Christian converts and the staffs of the other Legations, their wives and families. The most vulnerable of these Legations were soon abandoned, and there was what *The Times* correspondent called "a veritable stampede" into the British compound where by the end of the month the foreigners were, as the Empress Dowager contentedly wrote, "like fish in the stew-pan."

Opium pipe in hand, the Empress Dowager assumes Satanic proportions in this savage magazine caricature published for British residents in Shanghai in November, 1900.

The Empress would have liked to see the stew-pan become a cauldron; but her more moderate advisers urged her to hold back from ordering a general massacre. And day by day the defenders took fresh heart. They had little ammunition; but there was a plentiful supply of water; food was abundant, and spirits were high. And most of the Europeans were ready to take any part in the defence. (One Norwegian missionary, however, went mad, took to wearing a top hat with a black cassock and indecently exposed himself to the Russian Minister's wife.)

MacDonald, who had been an infantry officer in his youth, assumed responsibility for the defence, and the besieged frequently went on the attack. Once a small force of Americans, Russians and British captured a troublesome bastion on the Tartar Wall, killed almost 30 of the Chinese and captured numerous rifles and bandoliers of ammunition.

While the men were fighting, the wives made sandbags out of the Legation's expensive furnishings and silks, formed lines with their children, passing buckets, basins, jugs and chamber-pots from hand to hand as they helped to put out fires. It was believed that each of them had arranged to shoot herself and the girls in her care should the defences fail.

Though an International Relief Force was on its way from Tientsin, on August 13 it appeared that if it arrived at all it would be too late. Despite the Chinese government's former reluctance to allow the Boxers to force the fight to a conclusion, on that day the attackers made a really determined effort to break into the British compound. The noise of firing was so deafening that the defenders could not hear themselves speak. Where was the relief force?

The force's 20,000 men, half of them Japanese, had not left Tientsin until August 4. An earlier attempt by a far smaller force to get through to Peking had been thwarted by massive forces of Boxers and Kansu cavalry; and doubt was felt that even this far larger relief force would be able to get to Peking before the Legations were captured. It was not until the arrival in Tientsin of General Alfred Gaselee, commander of the British contingent, that the fatalistic lethargy was overcome and replaced by a sense of extreme urgency. By August 11, the Japanese, American, Russian and British contingents had all reached Chang-chiawan, within striking distance of Peking.

Two days later, while the defenders of the Legations were fighting off the fiercest assault to which they had yet been subjected, the Relief Force was racing towards the gates of Peking. One by one the gates fell; and at half past two on the afternoon of August 14, General Gaselee, smiling broadly and with tears in his eyes, was standing in the British compound shaking hands with its defenders. Sixty-six foreigners had been killed and over 150 wounded. Beyond the line of defences lay rotting corpses, skulls picked clean by dogs, and "pathetic wisps of pigtails half covered with rubbish." Towards the end, the Chinese converts had been reduced to eating the leaves and bark of the trees in the Legation grounds. Yet in the best tradition of the British Empire, the white survivors soon appeared, looking fresh and unconcerned, as though nothing particularly untoward had happened: "The ladies," according to one eyewitness, "were quite 'got up'," the men "had speckless linen on."

Already the looting of Peking had begun. It continued for days until the city had been as thoroughly ransacked as the Summer Palace had been 40 years before. And when the looting was over, yet another harsh treaty was imposed upon the Chinese. An indemnity of no less than $450,000,000 was required of them; the Taku forts were to be demolished; foreign troops were to be stationed between Tientsin and Peking; China was to import no more armaments. And, to punish the official classes for their supposed responsibility for the anti-foreign riots, the state examinations were to be suspended for five years in all the places where outrages against foreigners had taken place.

The treaty was signed on September 17, 1901, and thereafter China once more relapsed into an uneasy acceptance of foreign domination. Chinese poets lamented the failure of the Boxer Uprising and attacked those who meekly accepted their degradation:

Last year we called him the Foreign Devil,
Now we call him, "Mr. Foreigner, Sir. . . ."

But such subservience was brief. The seeds of revolution had been sown.

THE BOXER REBELLION

By 1900, Westerners – typified by the man in the sedan-chair (above) – were becoming so obnoxious in their attitudes towards the Chinese that a secret society of Chinese militants, known as the "Boxers," launched a revolt. The Boxers' fury stemmed from two causes: resentment at Western attitudes of superiority and fear that the Chinese Empire would be partitioned among the Europeans. After the Boxers began their attacks on "Foreign Devils" and Western-influenced Chinese Christian converts in the north-eastern provinces, the revolt spread so rapidly that Empress Dowager Yehonola – the power behind the Chinese throne, who shared the Boxers' feelings – decided to support the rebellion as a means of ending foreign domination.

Excited Chinese read a Boxer manifesto in Peking. By January, 1900, anti-foreign propaganda was displayed in most northern towns.

Boxers burn down a railway station north of Peking in September, 1900. Railways, they believed, disturbed the spirits of the earth.

Ludicrous Failure

When the Boxers began to riot in May, 1900, foreign diplomats in Peking were slow to conclude that the Boxers meant business. They dallied indecisively for a month, then summoned only a small guard numbering 400 men to protect themselves and their Legations. Weeks later, after the grandstand at Peking's racecourse was burned down, an urgent plea for help, "before it is too late," was sent to the Treaty Port of Tientsin, where foreign forces were stationed.

An International Relief Force, of 2,129 men from eight countries including Britain, Germany and Russia, under the command of Sir Edward Seymour set out by rail the next day. It was only 80 miles to Peking and officers packed their full-dress uniforms, confidently imagining a journey of a few hours.

After four days, having covered only half the distance, the Force was trapped and cut off from the world. Boxers, now joined by regular Chinese troops, had blocked off the rail link both ahead of and behind the allies. And with telegraph services also cut, the whereabouts of the Relief Force, soon in retreat, was a mystery, an event that earned Sir Edward Seymour the nickname of "See no More."

First news of the Force's stumbling withdrawal along the banks of the Peiho River came when, after capturing an immense Chinese arsenal, at Hsiku, it was able to dig itself in and summon an allied contingent to the rescue from Tientsin.

A larger International Relief Force was essential. Its formation was placed in the capable hands of a British general, Alfred Gaselee, who eventually mustered 17,000 men from eight countries. The largest contingents came from Russia, Japan, Britain and the United States.

The second International Relief Force finally set off to march against the Boxers in Peking on August 4.

It was an ill-executed advance, dogged by international rivalry. Communications were so poor that in one instance a British or Russian battery – no one seemed to know which – shelled the American contingent by mistake, and four men died. However, Boxer resistance melted before the advance and the four largest national contingents moved towards Peking so rapidly that the small French, German, Italian and Austrian contingents were left behind.

During their retreat to Tientsin, allied storming-parties

Sepoys and German troops move on Peking. The Germans acquired a fearsome reputation in heeding their Kaiser's commands: "Anybody who falls into

of the first Relief Force cross the Peiho River to take the 40-acre Hsiku arsenal.

Boxers menace men of Seymour's force advancing from Tientsin.

your hands must be destroyed!"

German troops proudly bear captured Boxer flags back to camp after a battle near Tientsin.

British soldiers drive back Boxers bearing down on their Legation from the neighbouring National Academy. The Boxers had set fire to the building in

United in victory, allied officers inspect an ornate entrance to Peking's Forbidden City, from which the Empress had fled.

Attack by Fire

By June 20, the foreigners in Peking were, in the words of the Empress Dowager, "like fish in the stew-pan." Boxers had killed the Japanese and German Ministers. Now, the remaining diplomats, with foreign engineers, missionaries and hundreds of Chinese Christians were under siege behind the walls of the British Legation, the largest of the eleven Embassies in Peking.

Outside, the cry *"Sha! Sha!"* (Kill! Kill!) proclaimed the wholesale murder of Christian converts. Churches, shops, homes and the smaller foreign Legations were burned to the ground.

Despite the turmoil, few of the foreigners believed the siege would last for long: the Relief Force, they knew, was somewhere on its way. And if their ammunition was low, supplies of food and water were adequate: horse meat and rice were washed down with champagne. While wives sewed sandbags from expensive furnishings, men ventured out on sorties aimed at rescuing Chinese Christians and at least niggling the enemy. Chinese troops frequently attacked the Legation but, because moderate advisers held some sway over the Empress Dowager, never in an all-out assault.

Only on the 54th day of the siege, with the Relief Force beneath the walls of the capital, did the Chinese finally make a large-scale attack. But it was too late. On the 55th day, allied forces stormed the gates of Peking to end a revolt in which over 100 foreigners and some quarter of a million Christian Chinese had lost their lives.

the vain hope that the flames would spread to engulf the foreigners besieged next door.

Vindictive Aftermath

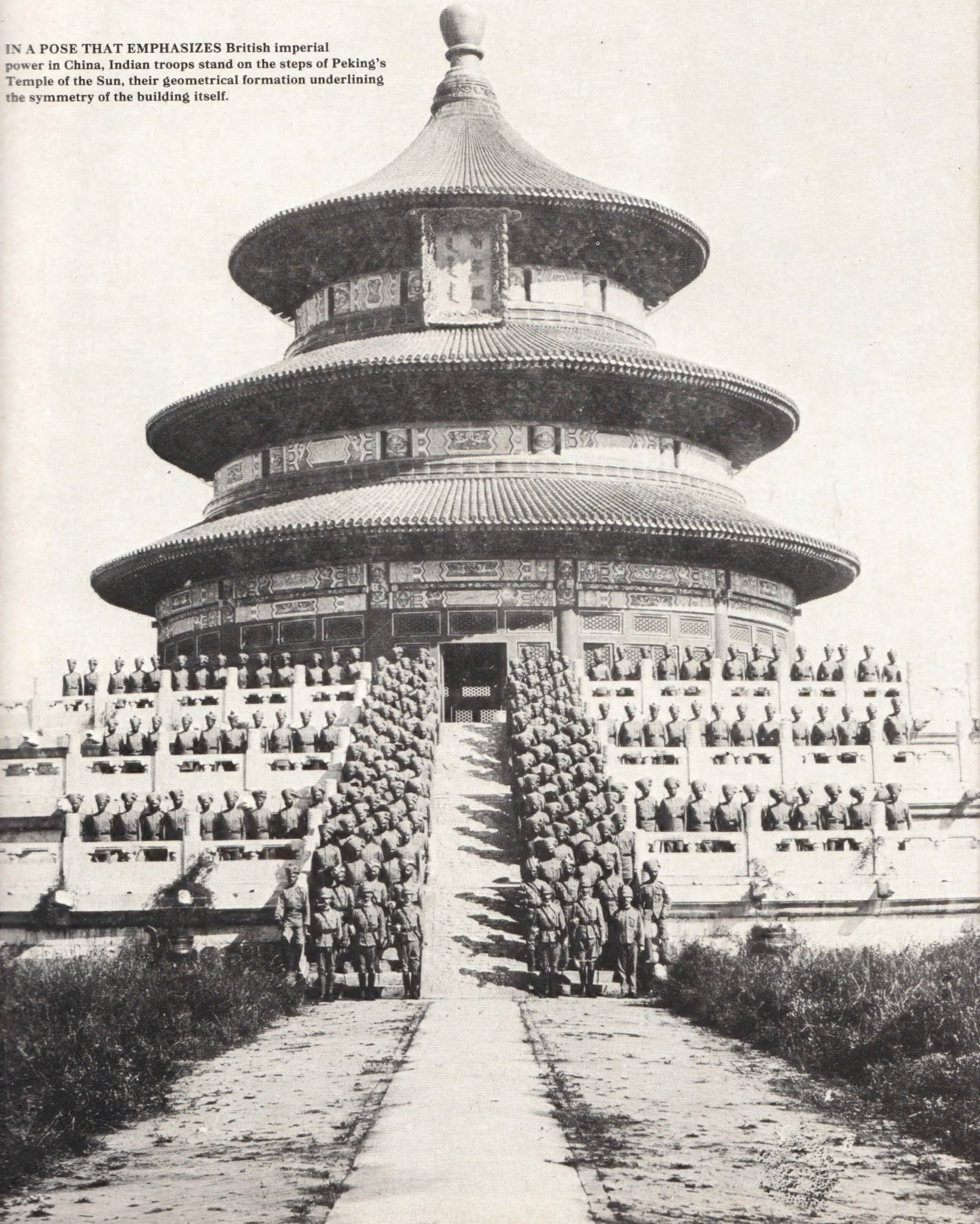
Violence did not end with the defeat of the Boxers. Peking was in the hands of the foreigners who craved revenge. Troops and civilians, even diplomats' wives, proceeded to loot and ransack the city of almost anything of value.

Reprisals began, backed by Chinese Imperial troops now under allied command. Foreign and Imperial forces set out on punitive forays which, to the German Field-Marshal, von Waldersee, exerted "a moral influence of far-reaching importance" – a doubtful judgement in view of the rough-hewn justice meted out. A British officer, commenting on one incident, wrote: "We fired about 2,000 rounds, mostly at inoffensive people I believe, and killed about 15 of them." General Chaffee, commander of the American forces told a journalist: "Where one real Boxer had been killed . . . 15 harmless coolies . . . have been slain." For a year, the vengeful foreign troops remained in Peking, until in the words of one hard-line official, "an idiotic spirit of mercy," prevailed and peace terms were dictated.

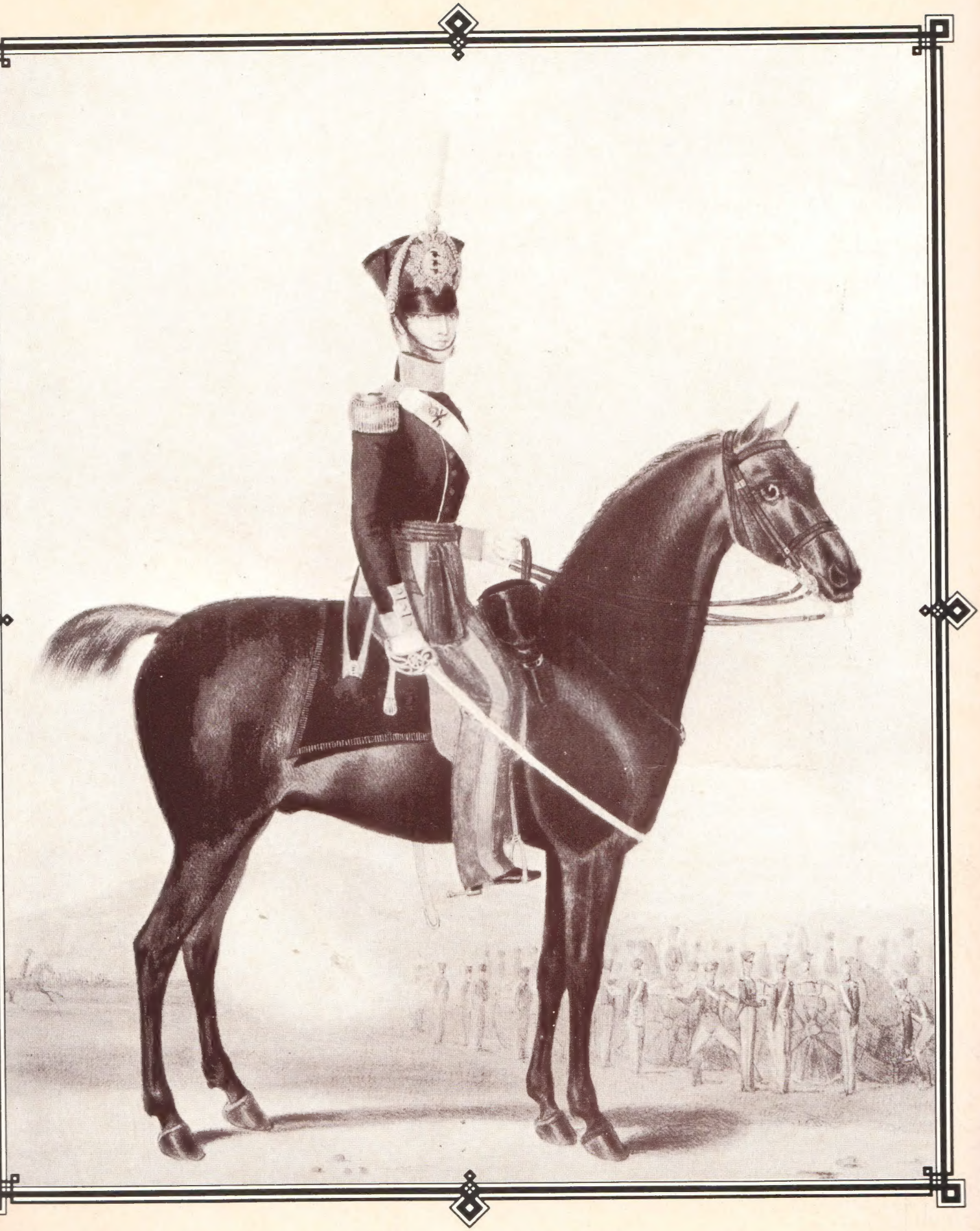
French soldiers execute two Tientsin Chinese charged with "looting with violence."

An imperial executioner beheads pro-Boxer rebels held responsible for the massacre of missionaries in Paoting-fu, south-west of Peking.

Decapitated heads of alleged Boxers went on exhibition at town gates as part of a Chinese government policy to appease the foreigners.



IN A POSE THAT EMPHASIZES British imperial power in China, Indian troops stand on the steps of Peking's Temple of the Sun, their geometrical formation underlining the symmetry of the building itself.



Officer, Royal Artillery, 1832